



## **DPCC Fact Sheet: Nominee for Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos Wants to Privatize Public Education**

### **Topline Message Guidance:**

- *Betsy DeVos is a billionaire who has used her extraordinary wealth to rig our education system against the children of working families.*
- *DeVos has pushed a radical privatization agenda that has been a complete failure for our children.*
- *DeVos has fought to allow special interests to profit off of schools at the expense of students and parents across the country.*

### **DeVos Wants to Privatize and Defund Public Education**

**DeVos' privatization agenda is not just extreme, it has been a complete failure for children.** For nearly 30 years, as a lobbyist and a Republican fundraiser, DeVos has pushed for school vouchers that would funnel taxpayer money to private schools, pressed to expand publicly funded but privately run and unregulated charter schools, and tried to undermine teachers and teachers' unions. The New York Times recently described her efforts as a "public education fiasco that is perhaps unparalleled in the United States" and the former president of the Michigan State Board of Education described DeVos' nomination as "putting the fox in charge of the henhouse, and hand-feeding it children." [New York Times, [6/28/16](#); [11/23/16](#), [12/12/16](#); Calvin College Chimes, [12/02/16](#)]

**DeVos and her organizations have spent roughly \$33 million pushing their extreme school choice agenda.** From 2001 to 2014, Betsy DeVos and her organizations contributed roughly \$33 million to nonpublic education, including private or religious schools, universities, and nonprofit organizations that support nonpublic education. In 2000, DeVos and her husband spent \$5.6 million on an unsuccessful statewide ballot initiative to amend Michigan's state constitution to allow tax dollars to be used for private school tuition through education vouchers. [Chronicle of Higher Education, [11/23/16](#); Detroit News, [10/21/16](#); Press Release – Dick DeVos for Governor, [3/31/06](#); Dick and Betsy DeVos Family Foundation – Citizen Audit, [Viewed 12/21/16](#); American Federation for Children, Inc. – Citizen Audit, [Viewed 12/21/16](#)]

**DeVos and her family have spent millions buying influence among lawmakers to push her radical agenda over the concerns of parents and teachers.** Betsy DeVos and her husband have provided millions of dollars in campaign donations to Republican lawmakers to push school choice. In recent years, the DeVos family contributed at least \$7 million to Michigan lawmakers and the state Republican Party. Their influence can be seen in almost every major piece of education-related legislation in Michigan since the 1990s,

including the 1993 law that permitted charter schools and a 2011 vote to lift a cap on the number of charter schools in the state. [Politico, [12/09/16](#); Senate HELP Committee, 1/17]

### **DeVos' Anti-public Education Agenda Has Made it Easier for Billionaires and Corporations to Profit Off of Schools at the Expense of Kids**

**DeVos helped design one of the least effective charter school systems in the country.** In 2011, the DeVoses and the Great Lakes Education Project lobbied successfully to lift the cap on the number of charter schools and successfully killed a provision that would have prevented failing schools from expanding. Since the cap was lifted, 24 charter schools have opened – 18 of which already had existing charter schools that were at or below the district's dismal performance standards. [New York Times, [6/28/16](#), [12/12/16](#)]

**DeVos' experiments in school reform have resulted in plummeting achievement rates.** Since DeVos' biggest education policy victories in Michigan, the expansion of charter schools – which are largely run by for-profit companies – and school choice, the academic rankings for students have dropped dramatically compared to other states. In 2013-2014, 70% of Detroit's charter schools ranked in the bottom 25% of all Michigan's schools. [The Center for Michigan, [12/06/16](#); Detroit News, [6/22/14](#), [10/28/15](#); The Atlantic, [5/10/16](#); Senate HELP Committee, 1/17]

- In 2000, Michigan students scored above the national average in 4th grade and 8th grade math and English on the National Assessment of Educational Progress test. By 2015, Michigan was below the national average in 4th grade math and English and 8th grade math, and was at the national average in 8th grade English.

### **DeVos Has Spent Millions of Dollars Trying to Buy Influence and Drown Out the Voices of Parents and Teachers**

**DeVos fought against a plan for Detroit public schools that would have increased accountability for-profit charter schools.** Last year, the Michigan legislature was considering a package that included a proposal to establish a commission to increase accountability for charter schools and serve as the “gatekeeper” for opening or closing schools. The proposal was supported by a coalition of stakeholders, including charter school advocates, labor representatives, Republicans, and Democrats. The proposal passed the Senate but when it went to the House, charter school backers, including the Michigan Association of Public School Academies and the Great Lakes Education Project which is connected to the DeVos family, pressured Republican lawmakers and killed the proposal. [Detroit Free Press, [5/21/16](#)]

- **The DeVos family provided significant campaign donations in order to kill the proposal.** Just five days after the Republican members reversed their positions on the Detroit Education Commission, the DeVos family gave an almost unprecedented \$1.45 million in campaign donations to Republican lawmakers in just seven weeks, an average of \$25,000 a day. Over the last 10 years, the DeVos family has given \$6.1 million directly to the Michigan Republican Party. [New York Times, [12/12/16](#); Detroit Free Press, [9/3/16](#); Detroit Free Press, [5/21/16](#); Senate HELP Committee]

**DeVos boasted that she expects a “return on investment” for her family’s donations to the National Republican Party.** In a 1997 op-ed in Roll Call, DeVos admitted to “buying influence” with her family’s donations stating: “[M]y family is the largest single contributor of soft money to the national Republican party....We expect to foster a conservative governing philosophy consisting of limited government and respect for traditional American virtues. We expect a return on our investment; we expect a good and honest government. Furthermore, we expect the Republican party to use the money to promote these policies, and yes, to win elections.” [Center for Public Integrity, [5/19/14](#); Senate HELP Committee, 1/17]

- The DeVos family donated at least \$818,000 to 20 current Republican senators during the 2014 and 2016 election cycles, including more than \$250,000 to five members of the Senate HELP Committee. [Washington Post, [1/6/17](#); Politico Pro, [12/18/16](#)]
- Since 1989, the DeVos family has given at least \$20.2 million to Republican candidates, party committees, PACs and super PACs. In the 2016 election cycle alone, they donated at least \$10 million. [Washington Post, [1/6/17](#)]

**DeVos directed a group that violated state election laws and was ordered to pay a record \$5.3 million penalty.** DeVos was director of All Children Matter, a pro-school choice PAC that operated in multiple states when it violated Ohio election law by transferring \$870,000 from its Virginia PAC to its Ohio PAC. The PAC proceeded to transfer the money even after it was informed that it was not legal. In 2008, the Ohio Elections Commission unanimously ruled that All Children Matter violated the law and fined it a record \$5.2 million. The PAC never paid the fine, which grew by \$25 a day and stood at \$5.3 million in November 2016. [The Columbia Dispatch, [11/23/16](#); Politico, [11/29/16](#); Senate HELP Committee, 1/17]

- The Ohio Elections Commission’s executive director, Philip Richter, described the move by All Children Matter as unprecedented in his decade-plus long tenure stating: “I’ve been with the commission since 1996 and I’ve never had anyone else ask for an advisory opinion and then proceed to not do what the opinion said”. [Politico, [11/29/16](#)]

### **DeVos has Spent Millions of Dollars Undercutting Civil Rights of Women, LGBTQ Americans**

**The Amway heirs have given billions to spread their conservative worldview.**

Betsy’s father-in-law, Richard DeVos, is a co-founder of Amway. He and his wife Helen, have four children, who are heirs to the Amway fortune, and all have their own foundations. Collectively the Richard and Helen DeVos foundation, the Dick and Betsy DeVos Family Foundation, the Daniel and Pamella DeVos Foundation, the Cheri DeVos (CDV5) Foundation, and the Douglas and Maria DeVos Foundation have given away more than \$1 billion. [The Grand Rapids Press, [1/4/16](#);

- A review of available IRS Form 990 from 2001 to 2013 from each of the Foundations demonstrate the DeVos family’s patterns of giving to right-wing organizations and causes well outside of the mainstream. [Senate HELP Committee, 1/10/16]

**DeVos and family has funded organizations that promote anti-women causes.**

DeVos and her husband have financially supported organizations seeking to eliminate a women's rights to choose, limit women's access to contraception, and promote rights of accused sexual assaulters on college campuses in order to undercut protections for women.

[Senate HELP Committee, 1/17]

- Tax records show that the Dick and Betsy DeVos Family Foundation has made at least two donations in recent years, each for \$5,000, to the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), an advocacy group that has brought a legal challenge to the Obama Administration's 2011 Title IX guidance regarding campus sexual violence (which was originally issued for in 2001 by the Bush Administration). FIRE argues that the Administration's directives have trampled the due process rights of accused students. [Senate HELP Committee, 1/17]

**DeVos and her family has funded organizations that promote anti-LGBTQ causes.**

DeVos and her husband have financially supported organizations seeking to stop marriage equality, promote anti-LGBTQ conversion therapy, and limit adoption by same sex couples, including anti-LGBTQ hate groups. [Politico, [12/2/16](#); AP State and Local, 5/22/04; Talk To Action, [11/23/16](#); New York Times, [11/20/16](#); Huffington Post, [4/29/14](#); Rewire, [3/21/16](#); Family Research Council, [2016](#); Focus on the Family, [ND](#); Senate HELP Committee, 1/17]

- “‘Republicans support traditional marriage,’ said Betsy DeVos, chairwoman of the Michigan Republican State Committee. ‘We support marriage between one man and one woman because that is the way God set it up and because children need a mother and a father to love and care for them.’” [AP State and Local, 5/22/04; Senate HELP Committee, 1/17]